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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 001256

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [TU](#) [HR](#) [EZ](#) [EUN](#)

SUBJECT: CZECHS ON GYMNIH/TURKEY/CROATIA: NOT YET FIRMLY
ON BOARD

REF: A. STATE 153187

[1](#)B. PRAGUE 1245

[1](#)C. PRAGUE 1243

Classified By: Pol-Econ Counselor Michael Dodman for reasons 1.4 b+d

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Czechs continue to deliberate their position on Turkish EU accession and to send mixed signals. Visiting Turkish MFA officials last week heard what they wanted to hear: the GOCR supports the Oct 3 starting date and will not impose new conditions. But during an Aug 29 speech outlining foreign policy priorities, PM Paroubek did not say a word about Turkey, although he spoke firmly in favor of moving ahead with Croatian accession. FM Svoboda is sympathetic to Angela Merkel's proposal for an alternate status for Turkey. Continued USG engagement will be important to keep the Czechs on board. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Turkish MFA Undersecretary Sensoy visited Prague on Aug 25. Turkish DCM and MFA Director for European Institutions Ulicny both separately told Pol-Econ Chief that the meetings went well, with the Czechs (MFA Deputy Minister Mueller and PM Paroubek's Foreign Policy Advisor Busniak) both stating that the Czechs will not oppose the start of accession talks on Oct 3. Turkish DCM noted the Czechs did express concern about the implications of the Turkish declaration on Cyprus, but stated that Ankara is "not worried about the Czech position." Ulicny, as he had in our previous meeting (ref C), indicated that the GOCR continues to focus on the practical steps that the GOT will take to implement the Ankara Protocol, for instance, to permit Greek Cypriot ships to call at Turkish ports. Ulicny also indicated the Czechs were slightly taken aback by Sensoy's strident salesmanship, but agreed that on the whole it was a positive visit.

[1](#)3. (C) However, Ulicny noted a number of potential problems. He described a 90-minute meeting led by FM Svoboda after the Sensoy visit in which the FM expanded on the themes he had highlighted in his Aug 23 op-ed (ref C; Ulicny emphasized to Pol-Econ Chief that Svoboda had penned the article himself): that the EU can not afford any controversial expansion debates that will distract from the critical need to focus on EU integration and healing following the constitution referendum defeats. Ulicny described PM Paroubek as in accord with Svoboda's views, as demonstrated by a speech Paroubek made to a meeting of Czech ambassadors on Aug 29 in which he focused on EU reform issues, promoted Croatian accession (see below), but pointedly failed to mention Turkey.

[1](#)4. (C) Ulicny described FM Svoboda as very sympathetic to Angela Merkel's position that Turkey receive a privileged partnership rather than full membership. And he pointed out that in the Czech Republic, as in Germany, pre-election politics are also playing a part in the Turkey debate: the opposition ODS is strongly in favor of Turkish accession (although they have recently been silent on the issue); Paroubek may be inclined to support Svoboda's views as a way of distinguishing himself from ODS. This tendency will be supported by a poll last week that shows 51% of Czechs oppose Turkish EU membership, versus only 30% in favor.

[1](#)5. (C) In response to remaining points on the Gymnich agenda (refs A and B), Ulicny noted that the Czech MFA had been traditionally supportive of the USG position on Croatian accession: that General Gotovina's transfer to the International Tribunal was a necessary first step. However, Ulicny said the Prime Minister had overruled the MFA on the issue. In that day's speech he had called for swift movement on talks, terming "one General" insufficient to hold up the accession process, and expressing his satisfaction that the Croatian government is doing its best to bring Gotovina to justice. Paroubek and his Hungarian counterpart intend to lobby the Slovak and Polish Prime Ministers at the Aug 30 Visegrad-4 meeting in Budapest to sign a joint letter to Tony Blair urging him to move forward on Croatia.

[1](#)6. (C) Comment: Our latest discussions confirm that the Czech position on Turkey is soft and that continued USG engagement is important. We intend to seek meetings in the coming weeks with FM Svoboda and PM Paroubek to discuss, inter alia, both Turkish and Croatian accession.

MUNTER